

keys, or secrets, to improving our English is to read and listen to books, articles, and podcasts that give us pleasure.

One of the types of reading which can be applied to free voluntary reading is the so called junk reading. It is a kind of fun and entertaining light reading that does not require a dictionary. It involves reading in large quantities, and it is considered to be more valuable than serious reading in small quantities. The materials should be almost 100% comprehensible, so learners can focus on the content rather than separate words.

Self-selected free reading cannot substitute traditional language instruction, it is not enough to guarantee students' reaching higher levels of competence in another language but is a great tool on the way to mastering foreign languages. Moreover one will definitely find this path rather pleasant.

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TEACHING WITH SMRT

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Teaching with technology isn't just about staying current on the latest tools, it's about knowing how to successfully incorporate the best tools into your teaching when and where it makes sense. However, technology is already integrated in nearly everything we do and nearly every job our students will encounter. Technology is a literacy that is expected in higher education and in our economy. It is a universal language spoken by the entire world, regardless of the profession.

The landscape of ESL teaching has changed dramatically over the past 5 years or so, and CCEL is in the forefront of this exciting change in the way students are learning.

The learning and teaching approach enabled by Smrt is informed by many of the principles derived from a sociocultural approach to language learning, including recognising the importance of context, interaction and dialogue in the teaching process, scaffolding learning, and mediation of language and culture. An underlying principle is that 'language and culture learning is considered to be a fundamentally collaborative process whereby socially formed knowledge and skills are transformed into individual abilities.' (Hall 2012, p.48) The goal is to enable students to make meaning, as opposed to scoring well on tests of discrete grammatical knowledge (Savignon 1991).

Two of the important elements of this approach that relate to Smrt are collaborative learning and the fact that Smrt is responsive to the needs of the students.

Smrt was designed to encourage students to work together (in pairs and/or small groups) as a way of using the target language in a real and meaningful way. This can be seen in every unit of every level where students work together on practice activities focusing on correct usage of the target grammar structure, for example, and then move on to production activities based on Smrt-provided situations. During these activities, the teacher's role is often that of a prompter and/or resource (Harmer 2007), and the aim is the successful scaffolding of learning. Within the classroom scaffolding is the process by which the teacher guides and supports the student within the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1994), to master the skills which they would have been unable to without guidance. Scaffolding is here a process of simplifying, directing, marking task-critical features, controlling frustration, and demonstrating. (Wood et al. 1976) This allows the students to develop learner autonomy, something which is central to the theory of CLT.

Scaffolding can, and should, be both designed-in to the curriculum at the course design and learning materials level, and performed by the teacher in the classroom, dependent on students' needs at that moment. Thus a distinction can be made between macro-level scaffolding and micro-level scaffolding, between the teacher's ability to 'plan, select and sequence tasks' that take account of different student needs, and their ability to take advantage of the 'teachable moment', the contingent situation in the classroom (Hammond and Gibbons 2005, pp. 10-11). Smrt offers the facility to do this.

Participation - student/student and student/teacher – is enabled through verbal and textual collaboration on shared documents. For example, students can peer-edit each other's written work via Google docs, either in the classroom or as off-site self study. Within each unit the material is organised in a non-linear fashion which allows teachers to select and plan lessons which best meet the students' needs and gives students the opportunity to work on areas of interest outside the classroom, thus increasing motivation for learning through greater student autonomy.

The teacher's role is to enable the process of mediation of culture and language by which students are able to internalise knowledge and skills: 'this process involves the cognitive and linguistic socialisation of students as they are initiated by their teachers into ... educational discourse' (Hammond and Gibbons 2005, p.8). Mediation

is also enabled by tools or mediating artefacts, such as technologies (Motteram and Sharma 2009).

Smrt is extremely flexible and allows the students to work at their own speed in the classroom setting. Teachers can monitor the classroom situation and adjust the pace instantly to maximise the learning experience for all the students. This could take the form of extra activities or research opportunities for a writing assignment, for example, or allowing faster students to access finer grammatical points through the teacher's blog. This allows the students to develop their competencies to a deeper level. The combination of face-to-face and online material gives the teacher the facility to use the medium most appropriate for the students' needs and match the delivery to the activity (Motteram and Sharma 2009). Classroom time can be used for developing fluency and teacher clarification of 'fuzzy' areas such as grammar, whereas student self-study can concentrate on 'crisp' areas, such as acquiring vocabulary via an interactive website that can give a clear yes/no answer, and for pre-class reading activities. This is an invaluable aid for both students and teachers in providing a full-service learning environment.

Smrt contextualises language in a meaningful way: a huge amount of real-life input, from listening activities on demand from the internet, to immediate reading material from live websites such as news sources. The students live in a connected environment and learning through using these same resources has an immediate and relevant connection to their everyday lives. Smrt mediates access to web-based materials for learners in non-English speaking countries, thus scaffolding their encounters through careful selection of appropriate material combined with related tasks and activities to enable learning. The affordances of technology facilitate a curriculum experience that is collaborative and communicative.

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